Art, Culture and the Syrian Crisis
Cultural Projects and Initiatives for the Inclusion of Migrants/Refugees

Wednesday 19th October 2016
Transformations in the Arab World

Art, Culture and the Syrian Crisis

- 10 million Syrians displaced by Syrian conflict
- Over 1.25 million in Lebanon
- Conditions in Lebanon often inhumane
  - Lebanese government won’t legally recognise Syrians as refugees
  - Lack of mechanisms for effective and sustainable support
Transformations in the Arab World
(2)

- Changes not just political, but cultural too
- Destruction of cultural heritage in Yemen, Syria and Iraq
- Increase in cultural exclusion and the erasure of culture
- UN: ‘lost generation’ of uneducated children and teenagers
Challenges for Syrians in Lebanon

• No legal recognition of their refugee status
• Unclear and illegal status of Syrian camps in Lebanon
• Harsh practices against Syrians, including restrictions on freedom of movement
• No access to art and culture for most
Linking to Cultural Policy

• Cultural policy in Arab region generally follows engineer or architect models
  – Reduces freedom and effectiveness of civil society

• Lebanon without a government in 2 years
  – Little possibility of effective government response to Syrian crisis
Some Questions

• How to implement a response that encompasses many different sectors?
  — Response so far has taken an exclusive approach

• How can we move beyond current temporary and activity-based cultural responses?
Creating a New Narrative

• The fate of refugees is a global responsibility

But:
• How can we preserve specificities of Syrian culture in host countries?
• How can we avoid stereotypes of Syrian refugees in host countries?
• How can we strengthen creative freedom?
Some suggestions

• Emphasise that circumstances and needs of refugees differ between host countries
• Challenge both refugees’ perceptions of themselves, and others’ perceptions of them
• Strengthen holistic approaches that integrate different sectors together
Create Syria

• Aimed to integrate cultural work with relief efforts
• Supported 11 artistic training initiatives around Lebanon
  – Initiatives received training, mentoring and financial support
• Beneficiaries and trainers were Syrian, Lebanese and Palestinian
  – Aimed to challenge stereotypes between these different communities
Create Syria’s Policy Recommendations

Policy recommendations were produced based on experience in implementing the project. They include:

1. Create a networking platform between Syrian cultural practitioners
2. Support independent studies on needs of Syrian culture in Lebanon
3. Support cultural activities by CSOs, especially those that aim at integration
Create Syria’s Policy Recommendations (2)

4. Enhance both managerial and artistic skills of cultural practitioners

5. Invest in new spaces for cultural activities, beyond traditional ones

6. Engage refugees in cultural activities that prioritise adding artistic value to the activities

7. Create frameworks that encourage Syrian-Lebanese artistic cooperation, to learn from the experience of Lebanese in handling periods of crisis
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Thank you!